



## Pick Your Path to Health

### Tips for Staying Physically Active

"I work all day and come home to prepare dinner for the children," says Thelma Andrade, a single mother of three who lives in New York City. "Once I'm home, I don't have the energy to go out and exercise."

Staying physically active and maintaining a healthy weight are two ways Latinas can improve their health. Yet finding ways to do it is challenging given the day-to-day busy lives Latinas lead.

Andrade, like many other Latinas, is not an inactive person at all. "I don't agree with the assessment that Latinas are inactive," she says, and points out she works hard cleaning other people's homes and her work is very physical. "I'm inactive in that I don't go out jogging or to the gym," she says. She explains that she tries to eat smaller portions and buys less breads and danishes, which are favorite foods in her household. And even though they live in a city where they pretty much walk everywhere, she and her children still struggle with excessive weight.

Exercising regularly is a challenge for everyone, and while many women are trying to lead healthier lives, staying active is tough. "A desire to exercise is not enough," says Edgar Cabrera, a fitness consultant in Maryland's Montgomery County who helps many Latinas develop an exercise plan and stick to it. "People need to work hard on getting motivated," he says.

If your daily routine includes working and taking care of your family, Cabrera explains, you are going to be tired and bored. "Women need to make an effort to make exercise a habit," he emphasizes.

As a fitness consultant, Cabrera says he's heard all the reasons in the world for not having time to exercise. While some of the reasons are valid, making an extra effort to exercise can add more energy to your life, he says. Sometimes people have been thinking for just a couple of weeks about exercising, he explains, and you'll be surprised how difficult it is for them to stick to it. On the other hand, if people have taken the time to truly internalize the motivation to exercise, they have a better chance of making physical activity a lifelong goal. What is key, he says, is to focus.

- Focus on getting motivated.

- Think about what it would take to keep you interested and engaged in physical activity. You will always be busy, he says, so move beyond that and work exercise into what is possible within your busy schedule.
- Try to do some activity every week. Cabrera recommends doing exercise three times a week for an hour to his clients. And try not to go a whole week without any physical activity. If you miss a week, you lose motivation and rhythm, he says.

### **More Than Just for Looks**

Exercise will not just make you feel and look better; it can truly improve your health. Modest and large weight gains are associated with an increased risk for heart disease, type 2 diabetes, several types of cancers, including colon and breast cancer, and musculoskeletal disorders such as knee osteoarthritis. For example, a weight gain of 11 to 18 pounds doubles a person's risk of developing type 2 diabetes, while a weight gain of 44 pounds or more has four times the risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

Because Latinas suffer from type 2 diabetes in disproportionate numbers, a weekly exercise routine can truly go a long way in keeping you healthy. The American Diabetes Association reports that the prevalence of type 2 diabetes is two times higher in Latinos than whites. A staggering 1.2 million Mexican Americans have diabetes, and between 9 and 11 percent of all Latinos in the United States have the disease. What is more worrisome is that only about half of those who have the disease have been diagnosed. So there are a lot of people out there who may avoid being diagnosed with type 2 diabetes by adopting a regular exercise plan.

## Small Changes Can Make a Difference

Because you plan to live a long, healthy life, taking small steps can help you adopt lifelong healthy habits. The *Surgeon General's Call to Action* reports that "For the vast majority of individuals, overweight and obesity result from excess calorie consumption and/or inadequate physical activity."

So make small changes that allow you to consume fewer calories and select key daily activities that help you burn some of those calories. For example, put a piece of fruit in your bag in the morning and snack on it when you need a snack. This will help reduce the urge to snack on a chocolate bar or other high-calorie snack.

Take inventory of your eating habits and decide what changes you want to make. Probably most of the foods you're eating are good for you but the serving size may need to be cut a bit.

Then, find ways to stay active. "The doctor has told me that I and the children need to exercise," says Andrade. "But he offers no suggestions on how to do it."

If you find yourself in the same dilemma, there's help available.

- Visit the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute's Web site to get a copy of *Stay Active and Feel Better*. There are also many other bilingual booklets available such as *Watch Your Weight!* and *Cut Down on Fat—Not on Taste!* For a free copy, visit

Choosing a healthy drink to serve at family meals such as orange juice or milk instead of soda can go a long way. See for yourself the nutrients delivered by a 12-ounce serving of the following:

	Cola brand 1	Cola brand 2	Orange Juice	1% milk
Calories (kcal)	144	160	168	153
Sugar (g)	38	40	40	18
Vitamin A (IU)	0	0	291	750
Vitamin C (mg)	0	0	146	3
Folate (µg)	0	0	164	18
Calcium (mg)	0	0	33	450
Potassium (mg)	0	0	711	352
Magnesium (mg)	0	0	36	51
Phosphate (mg)	60	55	60	353

- [http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/prof/heart/latino/lat\\_8pub.htm](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/prof/heart/latino/lat_8pub.htm) or call 301-592-8573.
- For tips on family fitness, go to 99 Tips for Family Fitness Fun at <http://www.shapeup.org/publications/99.tips.for.family.fitness.fun/>
  - The American Diabetes Association offers a free copy of Latin Flavor in the Kitchen, a bilingual recipe sampler with recipes with lots of Latin flavor that are good for the whole family. Call 1-800-DIABETES (342-2383) for your free copy. You may also visit the bilingual Web site at <http://www.diabetes.org/dar/> to learn more about diabetes.
  - For additional information, call the National Women's Health Information Center toll-free at 1-800-994-WOMAN or visit us at <http://www.4woman.gov>

Motivating yourself to stay physically active and consuming healthy foods is doable and can truly lead you down a path to better health.

*Pick Your Path to Health is a national public health education campaign sponsored by the Office on Women's Health within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. For more information about the campaign, please call 1-800-994-WOMAN or 1-888-220-5446 (TDD), or visit the National Women's Health Information Center at <http://www.4woman.gov/> To request weekly health tips by e-mail, click on the box that says, "Click Here for weekly health tips by e-mail."*